

A Comparative Study of Two Translated Versions of *Walden* in Chinese from the Perspective of the Translator's Subjectivity

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Abstract: *The translator plays a vital role in translation activities for receiving and comprehending the source text, and then accomplishing corresponding versions in foreign languages. Translators always strive to translate the source text as accurate as possible. At the same time, they are nurtured and swayed by different social and cultural ideologies that form their rhetorical features during translation. That is to say, translation work reflects translator's subjectivity in some degree. This research chooses two translated versions of Walden in Chinese, respectively composed by Xu Chi and Dai Huan, as research subjects and probes into two translators' subjectivity from two perspectives of translation purposes and strategies. The research aims to illustrate the effects of the translator's subjectivity on the translation text and contribute to the advancement of the theory of the translator's subjectivity.*

Keywords: Comparative study, Translator's subjectivity, *Walden*.

1. Introduction

For a long time, the translator's role has been undervalued. It seems that the translator is merely viewed as a transmitter who is entitled to explain the meaning of the text to foreign readers. Besides, translation studies exist as a prescriptive subject which is prone to discarding such dynamic factors as the subjectivity of the translator and the translation process. So the original text and its author generally receive more applause and follow-up than the translator. In the 19th and 20th centuries, lots of schools and activities, such as the cultural turn and descriptive translation studies, pitched into the research of western literature and translation theories (Touy, 2001). After that, the identity and role of the translator gained recognition and ensuing popularity, which was credited to a series of emerging theories namely new criticism, reception aesthetics, deconstruction, etc. With researchers discovering its great value, the translator's subjectivity has been a sought-after and essential subject in translation studies.

Walden is a classic and renowned literature written by an American transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau, and is hailed as an everlasting masterpiece with witty philosophy and truth. This masterpiece vividly recorded the author's solitary living mode in a cabin near the Walden Pond. Although it was not circulated widely at the times of Thoreau, his outstanding wisdom and brilliance left an indelible imprint on American literature and woke people's inquiry into pure bliss. As this book was spread to the world stage, more and more scholars uncovered its charm and potential for meticulous studies (Robert, 2007). Both professors and generalists set foot in translating this piece of work. Although the number of translated versions of *Walden* is increasing, pertaining research papers and files are still scarce.

It is unreasonable to rely on sole translation version to pass on *Walden's* marrow to foreign audience given the finished version at a fixed time could not meet the audience's horizons of expectations at different times. Instead, comprehensive and thorough comparisons among various translation versions would benefit readers and researchers. By means of selecting

several scripts from the two translated versions of *Walden* in Chinese, this article examines and justifies the discrepancies between two translation texts, makes a comparative analysis of two translated versions of *Walden* in Chinese based on the translation background, contemporary criteria, and their influence, and explores the theory of the translator's subjectivity. Ultimately, the thesis would be able to extract some contemporary values from the comparative study for the needs of modern times.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies on Translator's Subjectivity

In the 1960s and 1970s, a great number of European and American linguists, including Eugene Nida and Jackbosen, likened the work of translation to a mundane task dwelling on words and phrases, overlooking translators' subjectivity and initiative (Nida, 2004). Rare scholars were apt to dig into the subject of translation and its research values. The contempt for translators' self-awareness bitterly stung many translators' zeal and motivation for their careers. With the development of linguistics, sociology, and psychology, translation studies kept evolving in a fast speed.

The cultural turn in the 1970s also brought new energy to translation studies as a theory called the translator's subjectivity gradually came under the spotlight. It claimed that the translation activity was imperative for the dissemination of literary treasure, and relative research should take into account societal and cultural factors influencing translators' choices of words and techniques. Translator is the operator converting the original work into another edition in foreign languages. For the receiving end, readers were brought up to speed with exotic culture and knowledge by translators. The role of the translator is crucial enough to nourish, shape readers' conception and impression of the foreign world. Therefore, the undertakings of translators were by no means trivial. At the same time, it appealed for the change of the translator's identity from an "invisible craftsman" to a "restive traitor", arousing heated discussion.

(Bassnett & Lefevere, 2004).

Translation studies were prevalent during the periods of deconstructionism, feminism, and postcolonialism. For a long time, translation was a mechanical verbal exchange rather than a subjective activity. Nida Eugene, a distinguished American contemporary linguist acclaimed as the precursor of translation theorists, once put forth a theory called functional equivalence theory. Since the early 1980s, Nida's functional equivalence theory had been the leading translation theory, grabbing a wide range of attention and eliciting a large volume of comments in China. Although his accomplishments, to a certain degree, were beneficial to mitigate the dispute between literal translation and liberal translation, attitudes towards them were mixed. He Aijun, professional and dedicated in the field of comparative study of translation between English and Chinese, made efforts to delve into the subjectivity of the translator from three perspectives of the text operation, the objective passivity of the translator in social-historical context, and language usage. His research on several versions of Buddhist texts, such as the Diamond Sutra, and Heart Sutra, was an application of the theoretical framework of social discourse analysis, which buffers the argument between literal translation and free translation. A school called "manipulation school" was set up by academics with a resolution to analyze different translated versions of a single work through looking into the reception of translations and previous research on these versions. It advocated the appreciation of translation works by dint of newly-developing theories, including polysystematic theory and descriptive theory. Many scholars began to reexamine the translation activity as a result of the increased prominence of a translator's subjectivity in the west.

The cultural turn in the 1980s went further in emphasizing translation's function of cultural medium between the source language and the target language. A consensus was reached that translation studies should shed light on such external facets as society and culture, and reassess the effects of social-political context and demands of audience on translation texts (Robinson, 2006). Lefevere, a revered figure in the cultural turn, pioneered in a proposal that "to translate is to rewrite". Chinese researchers were then engaged in this movement and set out to seek practical guidance on translation of foreign literature under this trend. In Xu Jun's renowned book, *The Theory of Translation*, Xu stated that the consciousness of an independent translator should be maintained, which was distinguished from linguistics and culturology studies. Douglas Robinson took the translation activity as a loop in which the writer, the translator, and the reader all took part. Moreover, Xu highlighted the central position of the translator amidst a domain where the writer, the translator, and the reader remain independent of each other but continue interacting with each other.

From today's vantage point, translation is first and foremost a "cross-cultural transformation". The idealized translation process is constituted by three stages: comprehending the original text, internalizing its content, and transforming it correctly into target languages without improper modification or surplus interpretation, which conspire to yield an excellent translation work. The activity of translation is multi-tasking and demanding because the translator is obliged to perform

three roles simultaneously: reader, interpreter, and author. Under the precondition of carefully evaluating the original text, translators embark on reproducing and remolding it in target languages. If most readers have never been exposed to foreign culture, translators have to deliberately search for and adopt plain and laconic expressions corresponding to the original text to the maximum. When it comes to cultural communication, translators are supposed to introduce one specific culture phenomenon to another country. A translator need to be learned and intellectual to generate translation that adapts to the cultural background of the target language. That somehow raised the demand for skills and sensitivity of translators who were required to be bilingual and bicultural (Venuti, 2008). Pertaining to whether a translator could be appointed as the only subject in translation activities, they held divergent views. Whereas, scholars unanimously regarded translators as the pivotal and most active participant in translation activity. Those revolutionary and cutting-edge viewpoints and discussions drove forward the frontiers of translation studies. To sum up, the theory of the translator's subjectivity is quite illuminating for translation practice and positively acknowledged by researchers around the world.

2.2 Previous Studies on *Walden*

2.2.1 The origin of *Walden*

Walden ranks first in American Heritage's 1985 list of the "Ten books that make up an American's disposition. In the 19th century, the United States was undergoing a national core value building that molded the mainstream of American literature with its focus on utilitarianism and money-making affairs. Nearly all written documents were related to the burgeoning advances and promising prospects of the United States. The emergence of Thoreau and his *Walden* seemed to be incompatible with that prevailing atmosphere, so such a moral mind did not receive due recognition at that time. In his life, Thoreau mostly suffered from criticism and underestimation (Norman, 1921). In 1862, an essay titled *Thoreau (1862)* by Emerson was published and marked the start of research on Thoreau and his work.

In 1995, Walter Harding published a passage titled "*Thoreau's Reputation*" to depict the status and fame of Thoreau. With the potential hazard of industrial and technological development jeopardizing the ecological environment, people were in pursuit of psychological comfort, and felt called to comply with the innermost conscience. Against this backdrop, pointed reasons and rational epigrams noted in *Walden* made for the wide circulation of this book. The heatwave of translating *Walden* happened in the background of the declining ecological system and heightening consciousness of protecting the environment. That span of time witnessed translations of multiple languages coming up, including German, Dutch, Russian, Japanese, French, Czechoslovakian, and Italian.

2.2.2 Reception and translation of *Walden*

Walden, a well-known literature written by Henry David Thoreau, encompasses extraordinary philosophy and ethic. *Walden* is a highly appraised American literature in China for Thoreau's innovative and refreshing notions that resemble

Taoism. According to the comparative study between them, they have an overlap in the recommendation of inner peace and the observation of natural order. At the same time, they oppose the arbitrary and deliberate intrusion of the government which was alleged to have severely afflicted civilians. Aside from *Walden's* similarities with Taoism, what enormously attracted domestic audience were a set of ecological outlooks and mythical allusions embodied in it. In the beginning, the successful acceptance of *Walden* in China was attributed to some famous Chinese scholars such as Zeng Xubai, Zhang Yuerui, and Lin Yutang who got access to it in the first place. Xu Chi accomplished the first complete Chinese translation of *Walden* in 1949, and then this long-standing philosophical masterpiece gained entrance to the Chinese mainland. The majority of the Chinese come to know *Walden* owing to Xu Chi's earliest translation. Afterwards, different versions are available, with one of the most popular versions being compiled by Dai Huan.

With the 21st century coming forth, the acceleration of urbanization and the rapid boom of economy was raging on, people were confused by the fast-paced, highly intensive life mode, and strongly avid for serenity and idyllic existence. *Walden* was proven soothing and inspiring. Many translators devoted themselves to the translation of the *Walden* in Chinese which had amounted to a number of 36 until recent years, with Xu's version being the earliest and Li Jihong's version being the latest. The 64-year gap between two versions was so huge that it testified to translators' relentless obsession with *Walden* and their perseverance in perfecting translation works. Xu's translation version was taken as a paradigm by following translators. He was noticeably versatile in literary composition and possessed rich experiences and passion for creation, which broadly penetrated his translation works. Another notable translator of *Walden* was Dai Huan who had a good expertise in studying poetic theories and doing book commercial jobs, which lent him valuable enlightenment and made him accustomed to prioritizing readers' reading capability and receptiveness when translating. Neither of Xu and Dai had academic major of foreign language and literature. When exercising research and translation, they were normally free from rigid linguistic principles and rules, and preferred to channel their individual sentiments into the text. In that vein, their translation texts bear definite stamps of their creativity and consciousness, which are appropriate samples for studying the translator's subjectivity.

3. Comparative Analysis of Two Translated Versions of *Walden*

3.1 Comparative Analysis of Translation Purposes

Translation activity is in essence an action which must have purposes. In superficial layer, translation can equate with linguistic transformation. And the fundamental purpose of translation resides in translators' planned results of audience' reading experience. In general, translation activity has threefold purposes: afford target readers brand-new reading texts; back up or subvert mainstream ideology in target culture with the help of the translated documents; bolster or revamp the established reproduction models of literature and ideological discourse in target culture.

When Xu was carrying out the translation of *Walden*, it was in the period of the May Fourth Movement, an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal political and cultural revolution in China. With western literature swarming in and the Europeanization of language being pervasive, Xu's translation had a tinge of exotic properties, with some expressions far from being the commonplace Chinese expressions at present. Xu made extensive use of annotation for every piece of information related to foreign culture, no matter history or myth, which was superior to other translation versions in terms of precision, dispersing possible hurdles for audience to understand the original text and realizing foreign culture.

The time Dai started translating *Walden* coincided with the 21st century when domestic culture was revitalizing. Dai was quite familiar with the spirit of peaceful co-existence between human beings and nature demonstrated in *Walden*. And he believed the truth of life narrated by Thoreau would be conducive to people perplexed by social problems, which was the initial intention of Dai's translation. He stressed the reception of readers and was deliberately attentive to the target culture.

Example 1:

The source text: "I have traveled a good deal in Concord; and everywhere, in shops, and offices, and fields, the inhabitants have appeared to me to be doing penance in a thousand remarkable ways."

Xu's version: "我在康科德曾到过许多地区;无论在店铺,在公事房,在田野,到处我都看到,这里的居民仿佛都在赎罪一样,从事着成千种的惊人苦役。"

Dai's version: "我曾游历了康科德的许多地方,所到之处,涉足店堂,办公处所,田园,均可见到居民们好像以成百上千种引人注目的方式,在干着悔过的苦差事。"

In terms of the order and structure of sentences, Xu and Dai translated the source text in a similar way, but they picked up different words to explain "offices". "公事房" is a particular noun in Xu's time. Many contemporary phenomenal Chinese scholars, including Bing Xin and Lu Xun, usually used that word in their classics, so the readers of Xu's translation, living in the same era as him, could easily understand it. But since the time Dai translated *Walden*, "公事房" had been obsolete, probably obstructing readers from perceiving the word "offices". Hence, "办公处所", was an eligible alternative.

Example 2:

The source text: "This small lake was of most value as a neighbor in the intervals of a gentle rainstorm in August, when, both air and water being perfectly still, but the sky overcast, mid-afternoon had all the serenity of evening, and the wood thrush sang around, and was heard from shore to shore."

Xu's version: "八月里,在轻柔的斜风细雨暂停的时候,这小小的湖做我的邻居,最为珍贵,那时水和空气都完全平静了,天空中却密布着乌云,下午才过了一半却已具备了一切黄昏的肃穆,而画眉在四周唱歌,隔岸相闻。"

Dai's version: “当在八月间, 柔和的微风细雨停歇之时, 此时的空气和水幽静得近乎完美, 但乌云仍在天空密布, 下午刚过了一半, 黄昏的肃静已经浸透了湖光山色, 而画眉鸟的歌声四处响起, 隔岸相闻。”

The original description of the small lake was plain but moving for incorporating elements of air, water, sky, and wood thrush. Corresponding Chinese in these two versions were fine. While Xu preserved the original sentence structure, Dai combined several short sections of sentence into one part. What optimized the Dai's translation was the Chinese four-character idiom “湖光山色” which pictured the excellent sightseeing of the lake and mountain, and was infused with Chinese stylistic features.

3.2 Comparative Analysis of Translation Strategies

To realize specific translation purposes, translators would implement different types of translation strategies. There are four frequently used translation strategies in total: literal translation and free translation; foreignizing translation and domesticating translation.

3.2.1 Literal translation and free translation

Xu's translation held on to the source text when dealing with sophisticated terms, mottoes and enigmatic allusions, and made use of literal translation to indicate an entity of alien culture. Xu exerted his subjectivity in the honest and long preface and large quantities of annotations which prepared for patient and concentrated reading. Dai tended to exploit free translation, and even cast aside complex mythological and religious background, only signaling the philosophical gist in Chinese context, which encouraged audience to resonate with *Walden*. Hence, no signs of annotations were found in his translation work. If necessary, he would rather add words or clues to complement the source text.

Example 1:

The source text: “If the name was not derived from that of some English locality-Saffron Walden, for instance—one might suppose that it was called originally Walled-in pond.”

Xu's version: “如果这个湖名不是由当地一个叫萨福隆·瓦尔登的英国人的名字化出来的话—那么, 我想瓦尔登湖原来的名字可能是围而得湖。”

Dai's version: “我想这湖不是由一个叫萨福瑞·瓦尔登的英国移民而来, 就是由“石墙之湖”转化而来。”

The above speculation of how Walden Pond obtained its name comes from the tenth chapter, “The Ponds”. “Walled-in” was an imaginary name and a form of wordplay. Regarding the structure of the sentence, Xu still kept the adverbial clause of cause and even the dash; Dai eliminated the dash and shortened the whole sentence. As for the elaborate pun “Walled-in pond”, Dai simply made a literal translation of “石墙之湖”, failing to translate the conspicuous pun; Xu chose to call it “围而得”, another pun in Chinese, which ensured the similarity of pronunciation and the equity of meaning.

Example 2:

The source text: “Our whole life is startlingly moral. There is never an instant's truce between virtue and vice.”

Xu's version: “我们的整个生命是惊人地精神性的. 善恶之间, 从无一瞬休战。”

Dai's version: “在我们整个感性的生命中, 善良与邪恶之间的较量, 从未停息过一刻。”

In terms of sentence structure, Xu preserved the format of the original text, while Dai made a concrete translation of the ideas and thoughts and adjusted the sentence structure. Xu's translation version had two sentences, and Dai's version had one full sentence with three clauses connected by commas.

As for the translation of some specific words, three words were translated into Chinese by different means, which provoked readers to contemplate the hidden meaning from different angles. The adverb “startlingly” was usually interpreted as “to do something in a startling manner”, and the word “startling” was defined as “extremely unusual and surprising” or “extremely bright”. The corresponding Chinese were “惊人地” or “让人震惊地”. Xu kept the literal meaning of this adverb. But the word “startlingly” did not only function as a qualifier, it could strengthen the tone of the fact that our lives could be without morality. Dai did not give the corresponding Chinese for “startlingly”, but added two words “在” and “中” in the first clause of “我们整个感性的生命中”. These two characters illustrated how “startlingly” could modify the subject “our whole life”, which meant the whole lifetime; at the same time they served as a background for the next two clauses.

Concerning the word “moral”, the Oxford dictionary explains that it stands for principles of right and wrong behaviors based on one person's sense of what is right and fair, not on legal rights or duties. And the corresponding Chinese is “道义上的; 道德上的”. Dai's translation of “感性的” were a kind of free translation, and was closer to the original meaning. Besides, Xu translated the noun “truce” into a verb “休战”, while Dai dumped this literal expression and conceived a less threatening one, with a semantically coherent sentence being displayed as “善良与邪恶之间的较量, 从未停息过一刻”.

Example 3:

The source text: We worship not the Graces, nor the Parcae, but Fashion.

Xu's version: 我们并不崇拜娴雅三女神, 也不崇拜帕尔茜, 我们崇拜时髦。

Dai's version: 我们既不崇拜美慧三女神, 也不崇拜命运三女神, 我们崇拜的是流行时尚。

In the source text, Parcae denoted the Roman goddesses of fate. In Xu's literal version, “拜帕尔茜” mimicked the way Parcae was articulated. Without additional explanations of Parcae's symbolic meaning, readers might be at loss and made

wrong guesses for this quotation. Dai's free version revealed that Parcae stood for the incarnation of destiny, and readers might have no trouble in absorbing the emblem of Parcae.

3.2.2 Foreignizing translation and domesticating translation

Xu's edition of *Walden* was expected to guide Chinese to accept American history and culture and to chart the course for promoting American literature in China. As a consequence, Xu inclined to utilize foreignizing translation by retaining the previous sequence and structures of words and phrases, showcasing pronounced disparities between Chinese and English. In most cases, Dai utilized domesticating translation to help the reader deeply comprehend the source text. Owing to adequate reference from Xu's translation and special era background, Dai's translation was fluid and full of characteristics of Chinese literature.

Example 1:

The source text: "It is said that Deucalion and Pyrrha created men by throwing stones over their heads behind them: Inde genus durum sumus, experiensque laborum, Et documenta damus qua simus origine nati."

Xu's version: "据说,杜卡利翁和彼尔在创造人类时,是拿石头扔到背后去。诗云: Inde genus durum sumus, experiensque laborum, Et documenta damus qua simus origine nati."

Dai's version: "据说,丢卡利翁和皮拉奉神谕将石头从头顶抛在他们的身后,又创造出了人类,有诗为证:从此人类成为坚韧之物,历尽千辛万苦,我们源自何处得以求证。"

In these two translated versions of *Walden*, names of foreign characters are not translated literally, and translators always attempt to imitate names' pronunciation in a bid to create an exotic sense. Xu and Dai coined two sets of Chinese names for the alleged creator of human beings. The listed script was derived of a Latin poem exemplifying and reasoning about Greek mythology. Xu made sufficient annotations for this quotation that many Chinese readers had never heard of at that time, and placed them below the main text. Such a patient, considerate annotation satisfied the readers' desire to take in foreign history and paved the way for them to extend their study of western literature.

Dai's explicit presentation of the poem in Chinese seemed a little bit abrupt because the majority of the Chinese today were still unfamiliar with the origin and meaning of that mythology, so they might be unprepared to understand the application of this quotation.

Example 2:

The source text: "The most aldermanic, with his chin upon a heart-leaf, which serves for a napkin to his drooling chaps, under this northern shore quaffs a deep draught of the once scorned water.....that there be no mistake."

Xu's version: "当最高头儿的青蛙,下巴放在一张心形的叶子上,在北岸下喝了一口以前轻视的水酒.....一切都没有错。"

Dai's version: "那位青蛙王子,将下巴搁在一张心形叶子上,好像流涎的嘴巴挂着一片餐巾,在湖滨北岸,大模大样地把那该臭骂的酒儿狂灌一口.....迫使一切秩序井然。"

The original long paragraph unfolded a fascinating and vigorous spectacular. Considering the loose sentence pattern, parallel clauses, strange words and even onomatopoeia, it would be challenging to translate it without distortion or omission. Xu integrated three clauses into one full sentence in Chinese, completely recording how a gang of frogs entertain themselves and get drunk. With the aim of propagating foreign literature, Xu strictly obeyed the grammar and discourse of the source text, technically employing the foreignizing translation strategy. The phrase "the once scorned water" was translated into "以前轻视的水酒", but it did not make sense in Chinese. In comparison, Dai preserved the way the original text is segmented, and added words to make it smoother and more fluent. He took advantage of the domesticating translation strategy by substituting "该臭骂的酒儿" for the stiff phrase "以前轻视的水酒". "酒儿" turned out to be a special Chinese vernacular. The idiom "秩序井然" was also a typical Chinese phrase.

Example 3:

The source text: Standing on the smooth sandy beach at the east end of the pond, in a calm September afternoon, when a slight haze makes the opposite shoreline indistinct, I have seen whence came the expression, "the glassy surface of a lake."

Xu's version: 站在湖东端的平坦的沙滩上,在一个平静的9月下午,薄雾使对岸的岸线看不甚清楚,那时我了解了所谓"玻璃似的湖面"这句话是什么意思了。

Dai's version: 在9月一个岑寂的午后,淡淡的薄雾将对岸笼罩在一团朦胧中。我鹤立于湖的最东边的一片平沙之上,对"湖平如镜"一词可谓感悟透彻了。

In the source text, the author presented the location and date in detail. In Chinese, the narration of time precedes location as usual. Xu did not reverse the order of location and date as normal Chinese literature did. This opposite description introduced writing customs of English to Chinese readers. Dai separated this paragraph into two pieces of sentences in Chinese, and placed the timing "在9月一个岑寂的午后" at the start, which elevated the readability of the text.

4. Conclusion

Successful and efficient circulation of foreign literature demands good audience in conjunction with qualified translators. Translation activities can not be separated from cultural and social background of both source language and target language. The comparative study illustrates the translator's subjectivity of two translators. Xu's translation of *Walden* has a paramount objective of bringing in western literature and some cultural norms rarely seen at home, obviously tapping into tactics of literal translation and foreignizing translation. But it risked failing to cater to readers'

needs at the present time. Dai's translation could satisfy contemporary readers for capitalizing on free translation in pair with domesticating translation. Xu's version secured the reputation of the first and the most authoritative edition for its precision and exhaustive annotations; Dai's version win popularity among the Chinese for its agility and flexibility. In conclusion, the translator's subjectivity is guaranteed by subjective consciousness which could be traced from translation purposes and strategies. The performance of two translators' subjectivity is more straightforward through comparative research of two translated versions of one literature. For a translator, asserting subjectivity is the premise of establishing identity. In this sense, research revolving around the construction of the translator's identity are worth inquiring in the future.

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